Back to the Basics: Writing for the Web

Text Guidelines for Online/Print
1. Fonts
   a. Use an easy-to-read size, usually 10 or 12 points, for the text of web or blog posts. Headlines should be larger – 18 points or more.
   b. Use easy-to-read fonts, such as Arial, Times New Roman, Courier or Georgia. Steer clear of funky, decorative or stylish fonts.
   c. Limit the number of different fonts you use. You can use one font for headlines and another for the text of posts, but try not to use more than three different fonts in a single blog or web post.
   d. Use font styles such as *italics*, **boldface** and <u>underlining</u> sparingly. They can help call attention to certain parts of a post, but using too many styles defeats the purpose.
2. Layout and design
   a. Use lists to outline steps in a process, action items or tasks that need to be checked off. Introduce a list with an independent clause, followed by a colon. Use bullets or dashes to draw readers' eyes to each list. Here's an example:
      i. Bullets break up the text on a page.
      ii. Keep them short and to the point.
      iii. Limit each list to three or four items.
   b. Supplement your writing with visuals such as photos or clip art. However, avoid overloading your blog/website with too many visuals.
   c. Always credit the source of any photos you use. Clip art such as symbols, icons or drawings do not need to be credited because they aren't copyright protected.
3. Tell readers how to contact you
   a. Include a "contact us" page on your website or blog so readers know how to reach you by phone and/or email.
   b. Solicit feedback or news tips from readers. Tell readers where to email or call to suggest topics for your website or blog.

The Write Stuff
1. The "inverted pyramid"
   a. The most important information goes at the top of the post, while less important details or supporting sentences go at the end.
   b. Even if readers only read the first paragraph, you've given them the most important information and familiarized them with the topic.
2. Write strong headlines that grab the reader's attention
   a. An effective headline summarizes your main point in a few words
   b. Use the active, present tense voice
   c. Use a strong verb to convey action
   d. *Example:*
      i. **NO.**   Workers gathered at rally to protest contracting out proposals
      ii. **YES!**   Workers rally against contracting out
3. Web posts should be easy to read and understand
   a. Write in a conversational tone. Try reading aloud what you are writing. If you stumble over your words, then the reader might get lost too.
   b. Translate the jargon. Ask yourself: Would someone outside of your agency understand what you're writing? If not, then it's too confusing.

  c. Spell out all acronyms the first time you mention them and put the initials in parentheses.
    i. **Example:** "*The Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) won't be going up this year. However, we hope the COLA will go up next year.*"

4. Don't stray from the facts
  a. When you're writing a post about an event or issue, stick to the facts. You don't have to source everything you write, but make sure you can back it up.
  b. If you're writing an opinion piece or posting a letter from the local president, use a sectional headline such as "Editorial" or "President's Letter" to set it off from news articles.
  c. **Don't plagiarize**
  d. Get permission to repost material from other websites, newspapers or magazines.
  e. If you summarize another person's work, simply credit the source.

5. Edit, edit, edit!
  a. Always edit your work before posting.
  b. Run a spell check and grammar check to pick up commonly misspelled words or awkward phrases, but don't rely on spell check alone.
  c. Read your work out loud. This forces you to read each word individually and increases the chance you'll pick up any errors.
  d. Double check every detail. If you provide hyperlinks to websites, make sure the links work.